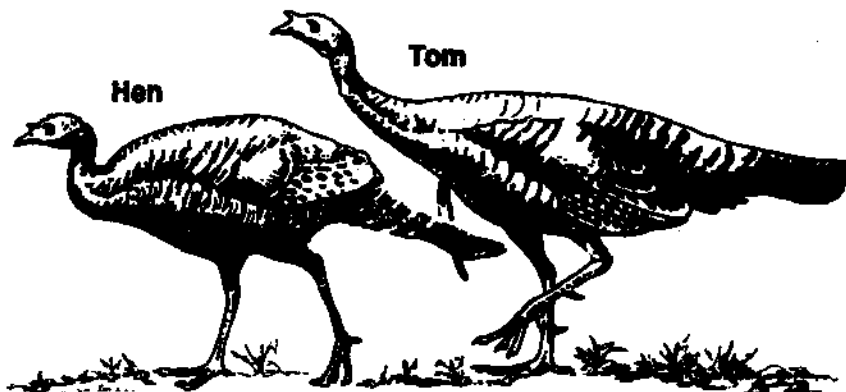


# **\*\*ATTENTION\*\***

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Doug Pifer illustrations courtesy of South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources Department and NWTF

## SEX & AGE OF WILD TURKEYS

Determining the sex and age of wild turkeys is easy when you know what to look for.

### **Breast feathers**

Differences in the tips of breast feathers are one method of determining sex in turkeys. Breast feathers are banded on the tips; bands are buff on hens and jet black on toms ("gobblers"). The bands are narrow on juveniles (less than a year old) and grow wider with age.

### **Beard**

Older mature gobblers usually have beards which average seven to ten inches in length. Many juvenile males taken during the fall hunting season have beards which are shorter than two inches.

Juvenile hens rarely possess beards, but a small portion of the adult females may be bearded. Beards on hens seldom exceed five inches in length and are sparse compared with the beard of a mature tom.

### **Head**

Hens and juvenile males have small, dark heads covered with black hairs and miniature black feathers. The wattles, fleshy lobes

that hang from the throat or chin, are dark and uncolored. A mature tom has a larger head with more wattles and less feathering. A tom's head is pink to pale red when the bird is relaxed, changing to hues of scarlet-red, with a white cap while strutting. When frightened during this displaying activity a tom's head turns bright blue. This may be a sign that the bird has detected the presence of the hunter.

### **Spurs**

Mature toms have prominent spurs on the backs of the lower legs, which become longer and more pointed with age. On an old bird, spurs can exceed an inch in length. Hens and juvenile toms have only rudimentary, inconspicuous spurs.

### **Outer primary or flight feathers**

Primary feathers are the stiff, barred, black and white feathers on the wings. The two outer primary feathers on each wing are retained for a year. The tips of these feathers on juvenile birds appear sharp-pointed and worn, while the ends of outer primaries on adult birds are rounded and bars extend to the outer tips. On juveniles, the bars are absent from the outer inch or two of the feather tip.

### **Tail feathers**

On a juvenile bird, the two center feathers are longer than the other tail feathers. Tail feathers on adults are equal in length.

### **Weight**

The weight of a turkey depends on its sex, age, condition and subspecies. An average mature tom weighs between 17 and 21 lbs. in late fall; a mature hen, 10 to 13 lbs. Juvenile toms weigh 12 to 16 lbs. and young hens about 7 to 9 lbs.

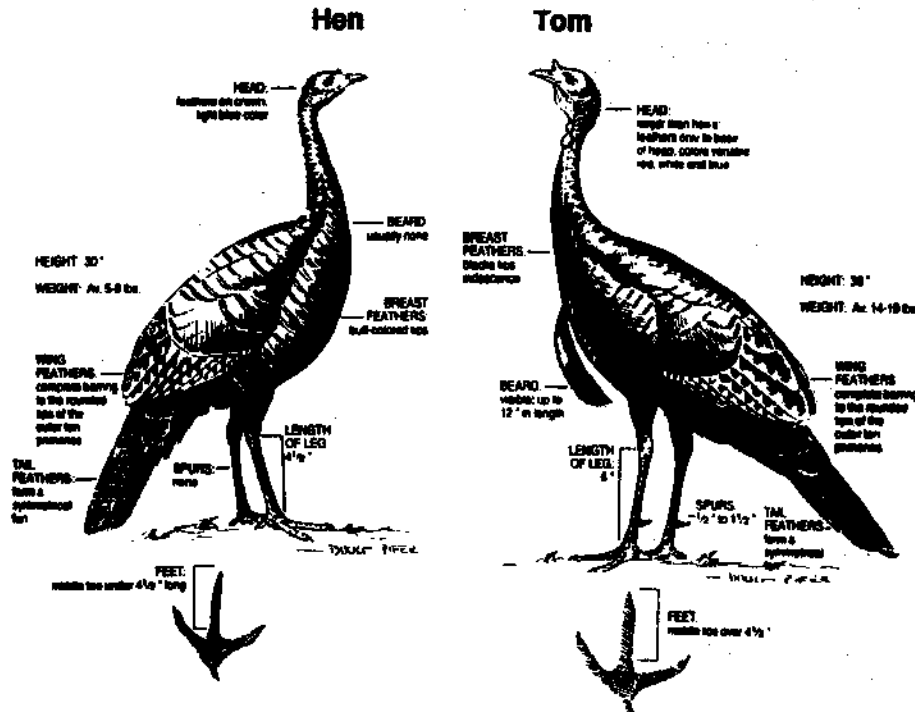
### **Signs**

The middle toe on a gobbler leaves a track at least four and one-half inches long, while the track of a hen or juvenile tom is shorter. Droppings of a gobbler are about the size of the little finger, with a slight crook at one end. Hen droppings are much smaller and shaped like a corkscrew.

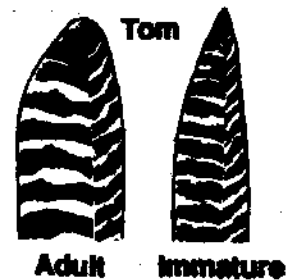
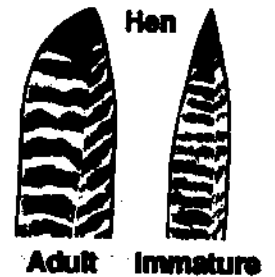
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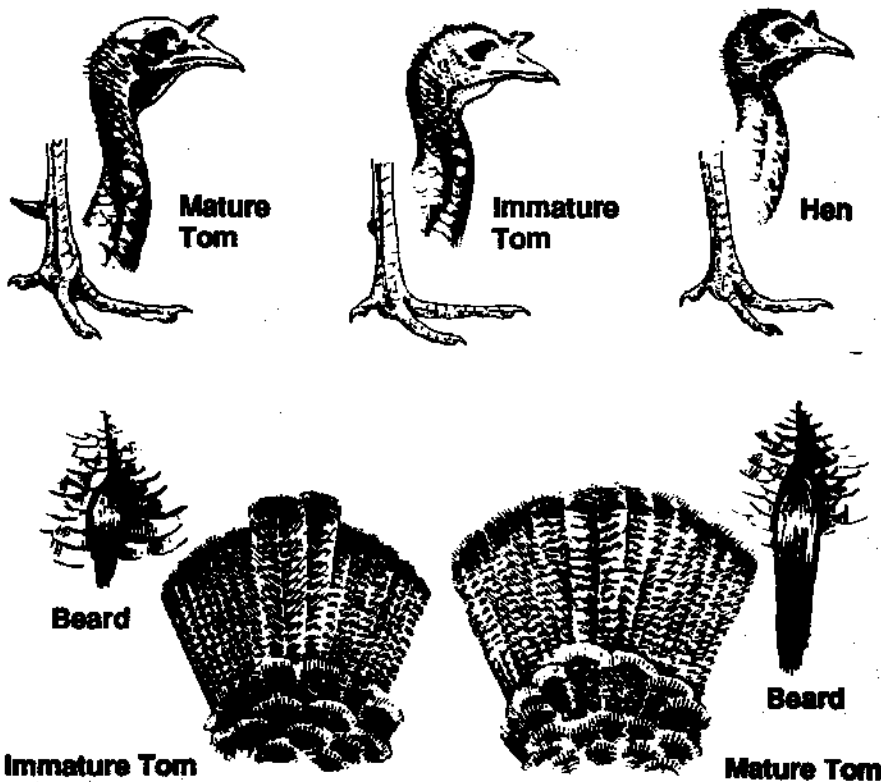
# SEX & AGE OF WILD TURKEYS



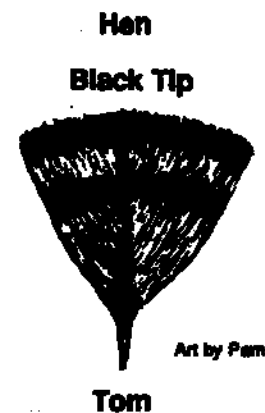
## Age Determined By 3 Outer Wing Feathers



Doug Pifer illustrations courtesy of National Wild Turkey Federation



## Breast Feathers



Art by Pam Thompson

Doug Pifer illustrations courtesy of South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources Department and NWTf